Problematising the Popular Discourses about Language and Identity of Young Adults in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The prevailing discourses of the print media in Bangladesh critique the way younger generations use English in their everyday Bangla conversations and show an increased concern about the purity of the Bangla language. It is assumed that the younger generations are in the verge of destroying the sovereignty of Bangla with their indiscriminate insertion of English words in Bangla sentences. It is also presumed that the younger generations are subjugated by the colonial legacy of English and consumed by the Western culture, and hence, they fail to maintain the sanctity of Bangladeshi culture and identity. However, acknowledging the political, ideological, and hegemonic role of English and globalisation, this paper problematises these simplistic assumptions. It demonstrates that any view that represents English as a tool of colonisation and neocolonisation or younger generations as responsible for the 'language pollution', somewhat understates the underlying complexities in these discourses. Hence, the paper has two distinct focuses. First, the paper discusses the role of English as a language of colonisation and globalisation in the context of Bangladesh. Second, it analyses the historical, political, ideological, and socio-cultural significance of Bangla in relation to its different regional varieties and indigenous languages. Based on these discussions, the paper finally indicates that the younger generations deserve a deeper understanding of the multifaceted factors that influence their language practices and their locatedness within the local and global linguistic and cultural flows.

Keywords: Bangladesh; linguistic imperialism; monolingualism; globalisation; young adults

INTRODUCTION

On 16th February 2012 at the advent of the 60th anniversary of the Martyr Day and International Mother Language Day[i], the High Court directed people in Bangladesh to preserve the Bangla language from any kind of intrusion from foreign words and accents and ensure the sanctity of the Bangla language at all costs. The secretaries of the Ministry of Culture and Information, heads of Bangladesh Television and Radio, chief of the telecom regulatory authority, heads of private television and radio stations were ordered to stop broadcasting any programme where Bangla was mixed with foreign words and accents. They were also requested to explain why they had aired those programmes in the first place. In addition, the Chairman of the Bangla Academy was instructed to form a committee and propose measures that might counterfoil the further possibilities of 'linguistic pollution' of Bangla (bdnews24.com 2012). Here, linguistic pollution refers to the insertion of English in Bangla or stylised pronunciation of it in exaggerated English accents.

In both the Bangla and English daily and weekly newspapers and magazines, editors, columnists, regular contributors write about the impact of English and popular culture on the Bangla language, Bangladeshi nationalism as well as Bangladeshi identity. The stylised Bangla with Anglicised accent of the younger generations, their indiscriminate use of English and Hindi[ii] and supposedly westernised lifestyle are harshly criticised (Chowdhury 2010). The encroachment of English words onto the Bangla language, getting Bangla 'entangled in a

foreign tongue', 'marring English peppering it with Bengali' or creating a 'mangled language', in general, is critiqued with strong reservation (Ahsan 2006). The English medium and private university students are identified as the most 'confused and lost' as they neglect Bangla, speak Bangla in English accent and have limited knowledge about the Bangladeshi culture and history of their motherland and mother tongue (Chowdhury 2010). In addition, the government is questioned why it has failed to establish the use of Bangla in all domains of life (Sarkar 2007, Shahiduzzaman 2010).

The prevalent discourses in the print media also show concerns about how globalisation is producing a generation more inclined towards the alien Western culture. Globalisation is thought of as a euphemism of colonisation and English as its vehicle of transferring the alien culture to Bangladesh (Hussain 2007, Mazhar 2007). In general, there is a rising apprehension about the alleged distortion of Bangla and the loss of the Bangladeshi culture and nationalism among the younger generations. Specifically, during the month of February when *shaheed dibosh* (Martyr Day) as well as *antorjathik matrivasha dibosh* (International Mother Language Day) is observed, talk shows and documentaries on television and articles in newspapers and magazines draw our attention and make us ponder how Bangla and Bangladeshi identity are on the verge of corruption. In a provocative article, Hussain (2007) condemns the *deshi shahebs* in Bangladesh who act /speak / or lead life like the English speaking people in the UK or USA (*deshi* means local and *shaheb* means foreigner) and take pride in asserting their inadequacy in Bangla, despite their Bangladeshi origin and upbringing. This sort of opinion about English not only demonstrates people's common frustration, but also problematises the role of English in Bangladesh (Mazhar 2007).

> It seems that the neo-colonial linguistic practice would like to prove that Bangla is a 'failed' language – just like Bangladesh is a 'failed' state. Neo-colonial Bangla is eager to demonstrate that Bangla bhasha as a language and sign system does not have the capacity to express the day-to-day needs and concept of a modern society, not to mention serious thoughts; its vocabulary is so poor that one must borrow English words in every sentence.

On the same note, Hussain (2007) strongly suggests to carry on the 'decolonisation movement' to reduce the gap between 'the privileged few' who know or use English and the 'wretched ones' who speak or use Bangla.

This paper does not intend to soften the impact of colonial hegemonic role of English on the life of younger generations. However, it problematises the two specific dichotomous as well as simplistic positions of English and Bangla, foreseen by the government and the print media: Bangla for Bangladeshi nationalism and identity and English as a tool for colonial subjugation. It critically evaluates the significance of English and other languages in the social landscape of Bangladesh and consequently, in young adults' life. In the following section, the underlying assumptions of the discourses of the government or the print media will be teased out and evaluated in order to appreciate the complexities inherent to young adults' language practices.

ENGLISH – IS IT ONLY A TOOL OF COLONISATION?

There is no denying that English as a language of imperialism has widespread social, cultural, educational and political effects (Phillipson 1992, 1998). In post-colonial countries, such as Philippines (Tollefson 2000), Nigeria, Tanzania, and Kenya (Bamgbose 2003), India (Bhatt 2005), or Sri Lanka (Canagarajah 1999), English has been a major cause of tension and social division between the elite and the 'Englishless masses'. Even in Bangladesh, English is

segregating people into groups and classes (Hamid & Baldauf Jr. 2011, Hussain 2007, Sultana 2003). However, while addressing this issue, it should be wrong to assert that firstly, English was always imposed on the colonised by the coloniser; secondly, language can be compartmentalised, for example, English for education and international communication and Bangla for national linguistic and cultural practices; and finally, the colonised are the non-agentive subjects ready to be subjugated.

The use of the concept 'English as the language of the coloniser' somewhat gives the feeling that English was forced onto the colonised by the colonisers. However, this concept is perhaps partially true. For example, English was not imposed on the colonised in the context of the Indian subcontinent[iii]. In this regard, the historical role played by Raja Ram Mohan Roy during the imperial period should be mentioned. A group of local Indians led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy first wanted English education in the Indian subcontinent for the masses from the viewpoint of instrumental motivation, i.e., learning more about the scientific and philosophical enlightenment of the West. The majority of the new middle class in the Indian subcontinent also wanted to learn English for utilitarian motive, i.e., a profitable career (Clark 1956). Hence, Mazumder (1960 in Rahman 2007, p. 70) states, "English education was introduced into this country, not by the British government but in spite of them".

This also indicates that historically the purpose of English in the life of the colonised was epistemologically distinct and different and English was not considered as a threat to the local languages. Even in Bangladesh today, people at the grass root level, contrary to the assumptions of the print media, in general do not consider English as a threat to Bangla (Erling, et al. 2012). Lin et al (2002, p. 313) bring another dimension into light about the relationship of coloniser and colonised. They are quite rhetorical when they question "Can we use the 'master's tools' to deconstruct the 'master's house'? They, like Raja Ram Mohon Roy, believe that only by appropriate use of English, "the various essentialised, dichotic, Self-Other construction and the Anglo-centric knowledge-production mechanism" can be "rework[ed], reimagine[d] and destabilise[d]" (Lin, et al. 2002, p. 313). From this perceptive, Raja Ram Mohon Roy was not the "collaborator of colonialism" or subjugated by the coloniser, but he engaged with and resisted the forces of colonisation (Paranjape 2013, p. 14). Scholars and social activists like Raja Ram Mohon Roy or Gandhi in fact inspires us think about colonialism as a site of struggle.

In the current linguistic scenario of Bangladesh, English plays a significant role in different domains of life, such as in education, law, media, and the workplace. It has significant extrinsic and intrinsic values (S. Rahman 2005, 2009; Sultana, 2003). The young generations are encouraged by their parents and educational institutions to develop competence in English in order to excel in their academic and professional life (Chowdhury 2010). Even people in the rural areas feel the necessity of learning English for status, better life chances, and social mobility (Erling, et al. 2012). English is the compulsory foreign language in primary, secondary, and higher education in Bangladesh. It is also the most significant language of academic discourses at the tertiary level of education (Sultana 2008), as the prescribed textbooks are mostly available in English (Rahman 2007). There have been extensive research studies done on the significance of English in the education system, both secondary and tertiary. For example, Hamid and Baldauf Jr. (2011) address the pain and anguish of rural primary school students who consider their school English teaching inadequate and feel themselves deprived and disadvantaged, as they cannot afford private English lessons. In an empirical study done on 115 university students in Bangladesh, Sultana (in press) shows that English as the medium of instruction is creating a complex web of relations among students' socialisation in the academia, their participation in classroom activities, power negotiation, and identity. The symbolic revalorisation of English (Giroux 1981) is benefitting those students who have competence in English.

There are also various donor-funded programmes that are working to improve the competence of English of students and teachers at the grass root level. To mention one is the DFID (Department for International Development, UK) funded £50 million worth project English in Action Bangladesh that intends to improve the English language skills of 25 million people through news, TV, radio, and mobile device materials, teacher training, and adult learning (DFID 2012). Even the linguistic landscape, both in urban (Banu & Sussex 2001b) and rural (Erling, et al. 2012) areas, is adorned with English on billboards, shop signs, and so on. Taking account of such a heightened priority of English in the life of young adults, to what extent it is justifiable to expect from them that they would have immense interest in Bangla or they would compartmentalise their languages according to domains, i.e., English for educational and professional purposes and Bangla for local social, cultural, and national activities. Therefore, a general comment, such as, 'the young adults are gullible to the language and culture of the coloniser', in fact do not appear to be a fruitful construct to address their aspirations, desires, pains and struggle in relation to English.

There are a plenty of research studies that show that individuals in post-colonial countries also defy the stereotypical image of the non-agentive colonised subjects and they use English to their benefits or to negotiate their desired altered identity. Vaish (2005, p. 187) shows how a disadvantageous urban poor community in India that has "historically been linguistically subalternised or disenfranchised" has improved life chances and is able to participate in the global economy because of English. For them, English is the "agent of decolonisation". A self-identified lesbian in Delhi, India, establishes her altered sexuality in English. She embraces English as an appropriate medium for her expression of progressive sexuality. She rejects Hindi as she perceives it as backward and discriminatory in the way it indexes sex (Bucholtz & Hall 2008). Thus English no longer belongs to the colonisers or to the superpowers. It is a 'heteroglossic language' appropriated by the non-English speakers of the world (Canagarajah 1999). Hence, there is a necessity of understanding how the "postcolonial communities may find ways to negotiate, alter, and oppose political structures, and reconstruct their languages, cultures, identities to their advantage" (Canagarajah 1999, p. 2). Canagarajah (1999) also suggests that we should not stick too stubbornly to our indigenous discourses, nor should we surrender unconditionally to English. When we do that we either conform to the stereotyped identities and image of post-colonial subjects or we become sponges of the colonisers' cultural values. Instead, we should break the dichotomic role. In other words, we should look into the linguistic hybridity of young adults in Bangladesh, i.e., language that evolves and emerges in creative and strategic and pragmatic mixture of Bangla and English, critically instead of critiquing it.

GLOBALISATION – IS IT A EUPHEMISM FOR COLONISATION?

Globalisation does thrive in asymmetrical flow of products and ideas from the US and UK to lesser-developed countries. People of these countries aspire for the language, values, and lifestyle of the English-speaking countries. Bourdieu (2001 in Phillipson 2004, p. 79) succinctly summarises that globalisation legitimises "particular interests and the particular tradition of the economically and politically dominant powers". Globalisation has also increased the popularity and currency of English and English has become "a sort of unstoppable linguistic juggernaut" (Demont-Heinrich 2005, p. 80). However, while critiquing the role of English in lesser developed countries, it will be wrong firstly, to marginalise the role of other languages in globalisation; secondly, to side-track the experiences of the younger generations in relation to English and English culture, even though the experiences

may vary based on their socioeconomic background; and finally, to ignore the role of locality in mobilising globalisation.

Globalisation is a very multi-directional organic process and other languages and cultures are also mobilised because of it. For example, since the early 1990s, in Bangladesh, general people in mass have started to have access to Hindi movies, drama serials, and talk shows through satellite cable lines. Nowadays, only by paying Taka 300 a month, which is equivalent to Aus $ 4.30, any suburban household in Bangladesh, can enjoy access to 15 Bangladeshi channels and 30 Indian channels, 12 of which are broadcasted in Hindi. About 21% of aired channels are in Hindi and 39% in English. Satellite service providers also air Indian films on the weekends in order to market their services to a greater number of customers. Even though the number of channels varies from suburb to suburb and the number of spectators of these channels cannot be speculated, this rough estimation shows the strong dominance of Hindi on the media in Bangladesh. The youngsters also tend to follow the fashion trend in Bollywood (Bombay film industry) and the fashion industry in Bangladesh also capitalises on the trend in hairstyle, makeup, clothes and accessories (Sultana, in preparation). In other words, globalisation does not only happen in English.

The younger generations in Bangladesh are not only interested in English. They are equally interested in learning Chinese in order to improve their job prospects in the booming garment sector in Bangladesh, which has strong business ties with the Chinese buyers and traders. The gradual increase of students in the Chinese language department in the Institute of Modern Languages at Dhaka University indicates the popularity of Chinese as a foreign language among the younger generation. They also have interest in Hindi, Korean, and Japanese because of their engagement with Indian movies, serials, and songs, Korean dramas and movies, and Japanese manga animated cartoons, and video games. They also listen to K-pop (Korean pop) and Pakistani ghazal. They 'shuttle between repertoires' (Makoni & Pennycook 2005). They would call their teachers *sensei* (Japanese word for teacher) or a friend who does not want to listen to them, as *chammok challo* (Hindi word), or young hot girl as *jhaal* (West Bengal, Indian Bangla), or a friend who fails to attract women as 'Johnny Bravo' (an American cartoon character who tries too hard to get women's attention and fail). They celebrate Bangladeshi New Year's eve as well English New Year's eve with equal interest and enthusiasm. They are also well aware of Chinese New Year. Thus they transgress the boundaries of their local linguistic and cultural practices. These examples given above also show that young adults' world is not always Western media dominated and their culture is not Americanised (Sultana, in preparation). They appropriate and recontextualise linguistic resources from different languages of the world, and English is one of them.

Most importantly, while critiquing the globalisation, we should not ignore the role that locality plays in young adults' life. Both the global and local impact on their language practices and emerging sense of being. The emerging varieties of Englishes, such as Indian English, Singlish, or Chinglish show that languages are living beings that come into life in use and eventually grow with their own unique characteristics. The futility of compartmentalising language use has also been identified by Makoni (1999) in the context of South Africa. Because of the "circle of flow", the local languages experience linguistic transformation (Pennycook 2007a, p. 122). The recontextualisation of global hip-hop culture in local context has been extensively studied by Pennycook (2003, 2007 a, b). Tokyo band Rype Slyme, Malaysian rapper Too Phat, or Korean singer Tasha, for example, create lyric with significant insertion of American hiphop expressions and slangs, along with local, generational, and distinctly local registers. They also localise English when they use English for talking about the local condition. Thus with the mixing and matching of English with their local resources, they make their music translocal. Banu (2000) also attempted to understand whether there is any evolving variety of Banglish and found some language and context

specific traits in English in Bangladesh. Sultana (2012) in a research on the language practices of young adults in Bangladesh has identified that they borrow English words and appropriate them according to the Bangla grammar, and hence, 'two classes' is '*dui* class' (two class) or 'in class' is 'class*e*'. They also have novel expressions, such as *voy*friend (*voy* means 'fear') to define a 'boyfriend' who frightens the girlfriend or 'character-*dhilaa pherson*' to define someone who has loose moral character. They also come up with their own words, with creative combination of English and Bangla. They, for example, add the English suffix 'ing' to the Bangla verb '*bolaa*' [tell] to show that 'bolaa' is in the continuous tense and create hybrid words, which have no existence in the prescriptive forms of any of these languages (Sultana 2012).

The active production and reproduction of language and culture within the local as well as the global linguistic and cultural resources evokes fluidity in young adults' language, culture, and identity. Their identities surpass particular locations (Appadurai 1999, Hall 1993, Hannigan 2002, Higgins 2009). Nakata (2000, p. 113), for example, suggests that changes in culture are as significant as preservation. "It is not just the 'essence' of our culture that is so intrinsic to us but it is also our capacity to form and reform it as the contexts of our life changes". Therefore, the emerging diversity in young adults' languages, culture, and identification in translingual, translocal, and transcultural practices and their creative integration need deeper understanding and appreciation, not one-sided criticism. This also makes us doubt the ambitious plan of the government that expects that a committee headed by the Chairman of the Bangla Academy (See Introduction) may come up with steps to stop the organic process of lending and borrowing of language and culture.

BANGLA AND MONOLINGUALISM: IS BANGLADESH A MONOLINGUAL COUNTRY?

The attempts to preserve the sovereignty and sanctity of the Bangla language and Bangladeshi identity are not new. They have been done at different times in the history of Bangladesh (described in the paragraphs below) and they have been justified with a reference to the long social, cultural, political and historical significance of Bangla. According to Azim (2002,p.351), Bangladeshis set an unprecedented example in 1952 in the Language Movement when they sacrificed their life in order to ensure the sovereignty of Bangla. Bangla is, thus a "part of our nationalist struggle" (Azim 2002,p. 351). She also mentions how Bangladeshis take pride in their rich cultural and literary heritage and want to preserve its authenticity through Bangla. Nevertheless, the nationalistic discourses in favour of the Bangla language seem problematic, if they are considered in terms of the linguistic minorities, such as the speaker of the indigenous languages.

First, these discussions, debates or decisions in relation to Bangladeshi nationalism and Bangladeshi identity refer to the Bangla language. However, the generic terms 'Bangladeshi' and 'Bangla' to refer to one single big Bangladeshi community to which all Bangla-speaking Bangladeshis belong is very much essentialised and deterministic, i.e., Bangladeshis can be clearly demarcated and defined into communities and nationalities based on one specific language. Even when the issue of protection arises, it is Bangla that needs fortification from English. This indicates a deeply ingrained assumption, and that is, Bangladesh is linguistically and ethnically a monolingual and homogenous country. The presence of different regional varieties of Bangla in the linguascape of Bangladesh, such as Sylheti, Noakhalian, Dhakhaia, or Chattgaya and indigenous languages, such as Chakma or Kokborok seems irrelevant to this assumption. The non-Bengali, non-Muslim Bangladeshis, i.e., the indigenous people (*adivasis*) and Biharis popularly known as 'stranded Urdu

speaking Muslim Pakistanis' (a minority Muslim group from Pakistan) are usually not mentioned when linguistic, cultural, and political significance of Bangla is discussed. As the main point of reference is one single language, the sociolinguistic significance of regional varieties of Bangla and indigenous languages remains unnoticed and unattended.

Questions may be raised if there is any country that is perfectly monolingual or if it is politically and economically possible for a state to recognise all the languages as official languages. However, there should be a positive discussion around these issues, so that these indigenous languages or varieties of Bangla do not become a low variety language in the linguascape of Bangladesh. Unfortunately, the government has never taken any constructive steps to understand with which language the Sylheti speakers or Chakma speakers negotiate and appropriate their subject positions or align themselves to the 'Bangladeshi identity'. Hamid (2012) also problematises the language policy in Bangladesh which puts the linguistic and ethnic rights of the indigenous communities in the periphery. That is why it is not surprising that a school administrator in a heritage school in the UK states, "When you talk about language it means Bengali. Sylheti is not a language" (Blackledge & Creese 2008, p. 538). He in fact voices out the ingrained beliefs and ideologies that people tend to carry in terms of regional varieties of Bangla and indigenous languages.

Second, when there is so much apprehension on the invasion of English on Bangla, there is no concern as such to understand the invasion of Bangla on the regional varieties of Bangla or the indigenous languages. What role does Bangla play in relation to these varieties or languages? Since the independence from Pakistan in 1971, the attempts of the government in protecting Bangla have always been based on linguistic exclusivity. Bangla has been given immense priority politically, culturally, and socially, at the expense of violating the linguistic rights of the indigenous communities. In 1974, after two years of independence, the parliament passed a bill and announced Bangladesh a 'uni-cultural and uni-linguistic nation state' (Bal 2010). The then only non-Bengali, i.e., Chakma parliament member protested on the imposition of Bengali identity on the indigenous people. However, neither his disagreement was respected; nor his sentiment was valued (Preetha 2012). In 1987, Bangla was affirmed as the state language (Article 3), citizens of Bangladesh would be known as Bengalis (Article 6), the Bangla language and culture would be its basis of Bengali nationalism (Article 9) (Bangladesh Gazette 1987). These constitutional changes, both taken in 1974 or 2011, put forward the significance of Bangla as the national language as well as the marker of Bangladeshi identity. The ethnicity of indigenous communities is given least importance in this discourse.

In 2011 there was a strong protest from the indigenous communities when the 15th Amendment to the Constitution of Bangladesh stated that people of Bangladesh would be 'Bangladeshi' by citizenship and 'Bengali' by nationality. In these steps, the government, in fact, shows its less concern over the issue 'ethnicity'. The indigenous people considered this constitutional amendment that forces them to be 'Bengali' as the invasion of their ethnic rights. They consider themselves as citizens of Bangladesh, but they also demand recognition of their own distinctive languages, identities, cultures, customs, and societal practices (PCJSS 2011). They also vehemently critique the discourses of the government which tends to define them as 'tribal groups', 'minority groups', 'small nationalities', 'ethnic groups and communities', when the United Nations' accepted terminology is 'indigenous people'. This is also a marginalisation of linguistic rights of the indigenous communities. Hammadi (2011), hence, laments on the fact that the progressive Bengali nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s is now being forsaken for 'aggressive Bengali ultra-nationalism' (emphasis added).

The consequences of the Bangla-only language policy for the ethnic minorities have always been critical (Ahsan & Chakma 1989). The indigenous communities have become invisible and non-existent in the social landscape of Bangladesh. Sanjeev Drong, General

Secretary of the Bangladesh Adivasi [Indigenous] Forum shows concerns that their children are marginalised in the mainstream Bangla medium education:

> When our children go to school at the age of 4 or 5, they don't understand anything – the instructors, the books or the teachers. They can't even answer how they are, in Bengali. They find themselves in an unfamiliar place, unfriendly environment. Slowly they lose interest in their studies (Preetha 2012).

This is one of the reasons why 55.5% indigenous children aged 6-10 are not enrolled in school and the rate of dropouts of indigenous children is almost 60% (Preetha 2012). This is a classic example of 'linguistic imperialism: "a structural relationship whereby one society or collectively dominates another" with the mechanism of "exploitation, penetration, fragmentation, and marginalisation" and "subtractive language learning and use" (Phillipson 1998, p. 103). The indigenous communities are forced to use Bangla, only because they are the minority. Their indigenous languages do not have any recognition in the nationalistic discourses and have no official recognition. Their languages do not have function in the education system and they learn Bangla at the expense of their mother tongue. This is 'subtractive' because their languages do not have chances of flourishing in learning or in use. They are deprived of their basic linguistic rights. With so much emphasis given on Bangla, it is a natural consequence that some of the indigenous languages have become extinct, for example, Kuruk, the language of Orao ethnic community and endangered, for example, Khumi, Khiyang, Pankho Koch, Patra, and Hajong languages (Preetha 2012, Mohsin 2003). Therefore, the decision of the government to protect the Bangla language from the 'linguistic pollution' of English seems biased, highly ideological and contested.

BANGLA AND ITS PERCEIVED INFALLIBILITY: IS IT UNCHANGEABLE?

The recent effort of the High Court in protecting the Bangla language no doubt is a solemn effort, specifically considering the fact that Bangla has long literary heritage and most importantly, many languages in the world are in the process of endangerment. The High Court, for example, states, "This language [Bangla] is the same that Bangabandhu[iv] spoke" and that "this language was also the one that such people Rabindranath, Sharatchandra, Jibanananda, Bankimchandra, Alaol, Syed Mujtaba Ali, Lalon, Hasan Raja, Shah Abdul Karim, Jashim Uddin and Kaykobad spoke[v]" (bdnews24.com 2012). In other countries around the world, we also observe the same preservation attempt. The European Union had to initiate projects through its Bureau in order to protect the language right of the Gaelic-speakers in Ireland and the Frisians in the Netherlands (Phillipson 1992). Nevertheless, the question is to what extent it is possible, firstly, to freeze the language in order to show respect to its rich linguistic, literary cultural heritage, secondly, to preserve it in a safer cocoon of a territorially defined community and country, and thirdly, to what extent these attempts are neutral and solely patriotic.

Any effort to preserve a specific language adheres to a belief that it is possible to keep a language static and unchanged over the years. While the government and the print media are possessive about *amar bhasha* or 'my language', however, in reality, the *promito Bangla bhasha*, the standard Sanskritised Bangla has gone through inevitable changes. The rising industrialisation, cosmopolitisation, and technological advancement in the Bangladeshi society have immense impact on individuals' mobility. On the one hand, there is a massive movement of the lower-income population to wealthier cities, such as Dhaka, Chittagong, and so on in search of livelihood. A large of number of students graduating from the high

school also migrate to the cosmopolitan cities in Bangladesh for their tertiary education, as most of the universities, both public and private, are located there. This has caused deterrorialisation even within the country, i.e., the demographic boundaries amongst different regions within Bangladesh have become permeable. In addition, young people in Bangladesh are becoming more mobile on the virtual space. Like any young adults around the world, they have bottom-less appetite for technology, gazettes, Facebook, msn-chat, and so on. They have exposures to varied languages and cultures because of their locatedness in the translingual and transcultural flow on the virtual space. They use shortened form of both English and Bangla words and emotive icons, such as :(, :D, and :(. Their use of these emoticons and symbols show that they have acquired the language of symbols and letters beyond their linguistic and cultural boundary and they also employ them when they write Bangla in Roman scripts on the virtual space (Sultana 2012). Thus they transgress the linguistic boundaries of Bangla in the deterrorialised virtual space.

What really happens when a law is enforced for language preservation? Does it always work? For example, the government of Bangladesh amended its constitution and introduced *Bangla-procholon ain*, i.e., the law that would ensure a sustainable use of Bangla in all the domains of life (Bangladesh Gazette 1987). Moreover, in 1988, the Anglicised 'Bengali', which had been used in international communications in English, was substituted by 'Bangla' (Banu & Sussex 2001a). This Banglisitation of 'Bengali' was a symbolic decolonisation of the Bangla language from the grip of English. The measures can be justified, considering that the government of Bangladesh wanted to protect Bangla, the language of the majority. However, the government's effort had two distinct consequences for the domain of education. On the one hand, the reinforcement of Bangla as the only language for medium of instruction gradually impacted on the standard of English education. Both students and teachers have become less competent in English (Rahman 2007). On the other hand, the English-medium schools kept the English education system alive with the patronage of the elite (Banu and Sussex 2001a). Eventually, these English medium schools became one of the creators of privileged elitist English-educated class. Pennycook (2002, p. 21), hence, problematises the 'butterfly-collection approach to language preservation', i.e., an approach that tends to keep the language preserved in its pristine and puritan form. He identifies that "protectionism" may become "a crucial strategy of definition, segregation, and separation". We observed the same phenomenon in the context of Bangladesh. One decision of language preservation thus disadvantaged one group, but empowered another. Therefore, any preservation effort needs a long foresightedness, which unfortunately seems absent in the *Bangla-procholon ain*.

Here it should also be mentioned that any preservation method of language and culture is not apolitical in nature. With reference to the languages in West Africa, Makoni (1998) states that the African languages had been historically considered as languages on a same continuum. The recognition and then the standardisation of Zulu, Xosa, or SiSwati into separate languages, according to Makoni (1998, p. 244), have their "genesis in concepts in colonial thinking" as they were useful for social stratification of these languages. Similarly, the declaration of Bangla as the official language was not solely patriotic. The nationalist leaders and the ministers who played steering role in the liberation war in 1971 and eventually in the formation of the newly formed country came from the rural background (Banu & Sussex 2001a). They were more comfortable in using Bangla. In addition, the notion of Bangladeshi nationalism and identity has been politically and discursively constructed in order to serve the utilitarian motive of the political leaders. Hossain and Khan (2006) give a detailed description on how two key political leaders and Prime Ministers, Sheikh Mujib and General Zia branded Bangladeshi nationalism and identity and indexed specific meaning to it in order to serve their own agendas. In other words, decisions regarding the standardisation

are never neutral. Neither are they always made on self-less motivation and patriotism. These decisions serve interests of certain groups at certain positions in the hierarchy of the bureaucracy.

BANGLADESHI IDENTITY – IS IT ONLY A LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON?

In the discourses of print media, the notion of Bangla and Bangladeshi identity and nationalism usually are represented together, entwined, as if the Bangladeshi identity is conceptualised with a reference to Bangla. Underlying this assumption is the view that identity is only a linguistic phenomenon and that individuals become members of a certain community and perform their identities through language. However, "the construction of self [identity] is a more complex operation than 'simply' making the right lexical, syntactic, and phonological choices" (Davies 2005, p. 560). It is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also an individual and a social phenomenon.

The notion of one big Bangladeshi speech community with explicit reference to standard Bangla denies the role of individual agency, individual style in language use, and multiplicity and fluidity of individual identities. The collective Bangladeshi identity is also inappropriate and inadequate because it does not address individual and social parameters, such as, class, socioeconomic and educational background, or gender (Hall 1993, Block 2007). In this regard, West's (1992) definition of identity seems appropriate. According to him, people's sense of their own identity is closely linked with material resources. "For identity is about bodies, land, labour, and instrument of production. It's about the distribution of resources" (West 1992, p. 21). Consequently, any discussion on language and identity, the point of reference should not be the language or community, a "linguistic utopia" but the social mechanism that causes language variations and identity formation (Canagarajah 2007, p. 235). Therefore, rather than critiquing the younger generations for their language and identification, it is important to look at the social dimensions that impact on the way they speak or the subject positions that they negotiate for themselves.

Here it should also be mentioned that identity is not only about language, nationality, culture, or ethnicity. There are other semiotic resources that individuals use, such as dress, body movement, hairstyle, makeup, accessories, separate territories in school and hangouts, or different taste in music to perform specific identity (Block 2007, Bucholtz 2004, Ibrahim 2003, Rampton 2003). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995), for example, mention about the new and growing young elite in Beijing, referred to as Chinese Yuppies, who prefer to demonstrate a life style through a distinct speech, consumption of home furnishing, clothing, toys, and leisure activities. Therefore, by focusing only on language, the multimodality in identity performances of young adults may not be understood. Specifically in the context of the present world, identities are always changing and are always in flux. That is why Bauman (2001, p.129) suggests to replace the term 'identity', "inherited or acquired" with 'identification', which from his point of view, has more of the essence of the "realties of the globalising world", "a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged". Therefore, it is high time we think about Bangladeshi identity as a process, always emerging anew, and not a product, always decipherable from Bangla, Bangladeshi culture, or Bangladeshi nationalism.

In addition, the popular discourses encourage some form of relatively fixed pristine *bangali* identity occupied by the Bangladeshis by virtue of their mother tongue. This kind of prescriptive definition minimises the role of contradictions, struggle, disidentification, and identification in individuals' sense of being. For example, a female graduate from the English department in a university may feel liberated when she thinks herself in terms of western

feminism and deliberately distance herself from the Bangladeshi female identity in her discourses. She may feel Bangladeshi to the core when she puts on red and white *jaamdani sari* (traditional garment worn by women usually on the first day of Bangla New year), colourful glass bangles, clay-made accessories, flowers on her hair, and a red *tip* (a decorative piece worn by women in the middle of the forehead between the eyebrows) and attends the New Year celebration at Ramna Botomul[vi]. A Chakma-speaking Bangldeshi may feel Bangladeshi when he travels abroad and represents himself to the world. However, the same person may negotiate different subject position in front of the parliament house, Bangladesh when he attends a demonstration in favour of Chakma constitutional rights. These contradictory and conflicted negotiated subject positions and performances of identity cannot be addressed with a deterministic language and community based notion of identity.

CONCLUSION

The discussion above shows that the nationalist stance in favour of the Bangla language may not allow for a fuller appreciation and further investigation of the linguistic scenario in Bangladesh. From the examples of language practices from different countries in the world as well from Bangladesh, it seems somewhat impossible to stop the evolution and emergence of languages. Therefore, the domain specific artificial separation of the use of language, i.e., English for educational and professional purposes and Bangla for local social and cultural activities, may be ambitious. In fact, the intention to categorise language practices is unrealistic and idealistic. The boundlessness of global space and the permeability of one culture onto others show that the age old sociolinguistic terms, such as language, nationality, nation-state, community, or national identity are inadequate to account for the dynamic use of English of the younger generations in Bangladesh. These age-old categories are perhaps too rigid to address the changing realities, i.e., mobility, immigration, diverse media, popular culture, or new technologies in life. This indicates the necessity of re-conceptualisation of sociolinguistics. As Canagarajah (2007, p.98) has already mentioned, a new kind of linguistics is needed that "treats human agency, contextuality, diversity, indeterminacy, and multimodality as the norm". There is also a necessity of exploring the role of the standard Bangla in relation to the colloquial varieties of Bangla[vii] and indigenous languages and understand whether the Bangla language is also the 'neo-coloniser', creating 'linguicism' itself at the grass root level, marginalising the linguistic rights of other varieties of Bangla and indigenous languages. It is the high time to reconsider whether the contested role of English in the imperial era or Urdu in the Pakistani regime has been replaced by the Bangla language in the independent Bangladesh.

In order to do so, the focus should be shifted to everyday language practices of young adults in their socio-cultural, historical, and geographical context and understand how they reconstruct their languages and identities in their own terms. There is also a necessity of shifting the attention from the fixed linguistic structures of Bangla and stable fixed essentialised versions of demographic Bangladeshi identity to a constructivist perspective that sees language and identity as more fluid. This will be an epistemological shift in the way the 'sense of being' is thought– 'being' with reference to abstract notions such as language, culture, and ethnicity to 'being' as 'doing'. Young adults are the makers of their languages and doers of their identities and they do their identities through their languages. Only a thorough analysis of their language and practices of life will shift the attention to the heterogeneity of locality. Consequently, this will take us beyond the 'monocentric' models of English and identify the dynamic account of localised English.

A formal investigation may also show that young adults' languages are messy and chaotic with the intrusion of English, Hindi, or regional varieties of Bangla. However, this should not mean that we leave their languages, defining them as 'linguistic pollution' and 'linguistic hybridity' – "a simplistic antidote to essentialist notions of identity and ethnicity [and language]" (Pieterse 1994, p. 171). There should be a way to understand and interpret the linguistic hybridity, without making it a category itself for multiplicity and pluricity (Otsuji & Pennycook 2011). Linguistic hybridity requires critical analysis itself. After all, any language practices are ideological (Blommaert 1999).

In summary, only an in-depth investigation of everyday languages of the younger generations in their social practices will:

1. strike a balance between the notions, such as colonialism and post colonialism, mother tongue and global language, preservation and assimilation, and monolingualism, bilingualism or trilingualism;
2. enable us to understand the role of English and Bangla in relation to its regional varieties and indigenous languages;
3. take the notion of Bangladeshi identity beyond its fixed adherence to Bangla and show the necessity of understanding it in relation to the standard Bangla, regional varieties of Bangla, and indigenous languages;
4. unravel the intricate relationship among language, identification, and the broader socio-economical, cultural, political, and historical landscape;
5. draw attention of intelligentsia, language educators, and policy makers in Bangladesh to the socially situated nature of language and identity; and
6. demonstrate the necessity of reconceptualising the old discourses of language, culture, nationalism, and identity in the context of Bangladesh.

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ENDNOTE

[i] In 1947, when the British monarch had to leave the Indian subcontinent, Pakistan with its two parts, East Pakistan, now Bangladesh and West Pakistan, was separated from the Indian subcontinent based on religion, i.e., Islam. There was 1600 miles of Indian Territory in between them and Bangla-speaking East Pakistanis and Urdu-speaking West Pakistanis were linguistically and culturally different. The political leaders in West Pakistan, ignoring the fact that Bangla was spoken by 56.4% of the entire Pakistani population, announced Urdu as the only official language on 21st March, 1948 (Maron, 1955). The 'one state one official language model' was again a new form of linguistic colonisation for the East Pakistanis, i.e. Bangladeshis. This entire issue of language controversy started a language movement, in which several students and citizens were killed by the police on 21st February, 1952. Because of this nation-wide movement and massive killing, West Pakistan had to give Bangla its due recognition and it was declared as a provincial language in the first constitution of Pakistan on 23rd March, 1956. UNESCO (1999) declared 21 February, the Martyr Day as 'International Mother Language Day' in recognition of the language movement in Bangladesh.

[ii] Hindi, the national language of the neighbouring country, India, is the popular language for entertainment.

[iii] Bangladesh along with West Bengal, the province situated in eastern India, was historically a part of the Indian subcontinent. For nearly 200 years, it had the same colonial history like India under the British monarch.

[iv] Bangabandhu is the honourary title of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He is given the title (friend of Bengal) for his phenomenal role in the independence of Bangladesh and is respected as the founder of the country. He

became the first President and later on the Prime Minister when Bangladesh gained its independence in 1971 after 9 month of liberation war against West Pakistan.

[v] Rabindranath, Sharatchandra, Jibanananda, Bankimchandra, Alaol, Syed Mujtaba Ali, Jashim Uddin and Kaykobad are the key literary figures in Bengal and Lalon, Hasan Raja, and Shah Abdul Karim are the most famous legends of Bangladeshi folk music.

[vi] At the dawn of the first day of the first month (*baisaakh*) of the Bangla New year, the cultural organisation Chayanat presents musical programmes in Bangla under the famous banyan tree in Ramna Botomul, Dhaka. People from all walks of life congregate at the Ramna area at Dhaka University Campus on that day for fair, different kinds of cultural activities, open air poetry sessions, musical shows, and so on.

[vii] There is no research study as such on how the regional varieties of Bangla are treated politically, socially, culturally in the context of Bangladesh. There are some research studies on the tribal language rights conducted by the international donor funded organisations.

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